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For Immediate Release

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## NEWS



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### **Cooperative Agreement Allows for Purchase of New Buses for Sun Road Shuttle, Flathead County Transit, Elsewhere in Montana**

*Partnership between Montana Department of Transportation, Flathead County and Glacier National Park includes purchase, joint ownership and shared use of buses*

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK, MONT. – Flathead County, state and federal officials are already seeing positive results from a new partnership that was signed into effect this winter with the purchase of eight (8) new 23-passenger buses and 22 12-passenger vans. These buses will be used on the Going-to-the-Sun Road (Sun Road) in Glacier National Park during summer months AND by Flathead County's Eagle Transit and other Montana transit service providers the remainder of the year as part of an unprecedented cooperative agreement between Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), Flathead County and Glacier National Park, officials announced today.

This cooperative agreement (CA) laid the necessary groundwork for a joint venture between the three entities for the purchase and shared use of twenty-two (22) 12-passenger and eight (8) 23-passenger buses which will be used beginning in summer 2007 as part of the new Sun Road shuttle system and elsewhere in Montana for the rest of the year. The fleet of 30 shuttle vehicles cost a total of \$4 million from funds made available to the NPS for Sun Road mitigation and from MDT through funding from the Federal Transit Administration's portion of the 2005 Transportation Act (SAFETEA-LU). All totaled, the NPS contributed \$2.1 million and MDT contributed \$1.9 million for the purchases. The NPS will also contribute \$385,000 to Eagle Transit for operation of the fleet. Ongoing shuttle operations will be supported through a \$5 set aside from park entrance fees.

Fresh off the Dodge DaimlerChrysler assembly line in North Carolina, the fleet of smaller alpine section 12-passenger *Sprinters* arrived at the park in January. More recently, a purchase order has been signed for the purchase of the eight large capacity buses. The low emission, bio-diesel buses will be manufactured by Optima Bus LLC of Wichita, KS. A late spring delivery is targeted; however, interim buses may be leased for the beginning of the 2007 summer season if necessary.

The Sun Road shuttle buses will be phased into operation in July 2007. All buses will include distinctive Glacier National Park mountain scenery artwork, with the smaller fuel-efficient *Sprinters* operating on the narrow and winding alpine route and the larger buses operating on the other two routes. The park's first priority is to use the buses on the Sun Road between July 1st and Labor Day.

Park Superintendent Mick Holm emphasized "The optional free shuttle service is not intended to replace the popular Sun Road guided interpretive tours currently provided by Sun Tours (Blackfoot perspectives) and Glacier Park, Inc. (historic red buses). The shuttles will only provide step on, step off, point-to-point transportation. Those park visitors wishing to enjoy an interpretive guided tour should contact Glacier Park, Inc. (406-892-2525) and/or Sun Tours (1-800-786-9220 or 406-226-9220)."

The final cooperative agreement was signed this winter by MDT Director Jim Lynch, Flathead County Commissioner Joe Brenneman, Glacier National Park Superintendent Mick Holm and procurement officers for respective agencies.

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According to Holm, “The NPS is very grateful to the MDT and Flathead County for their willingness to share in this collaborative venture. This agreement allows for the sharing of limited resources for the common benefit of Glacier National Park visitors, the Montana cooperators and Montanans in general; we view this as a win-win solution for everyone.” Holm added, Rather than sit in storage, unused for much of the year; the buses will be used elsewhere in Montana to meet local transportation needs.”

Months of discussions culminated with a final document wherein the participating agencies agree to cooperate in the funding, development, and implementation of a project that will:

- Provide a transit shuttle system that will facilitate the completion of the rehabilitation of the Sun Road on schedule and with minimum impacts to the environment, area communities, alternative routes, and the public;
- Maximize transportation services for Sun Road users by coordinating road construction, traffic management, and transit operations to minimize congestion and maximize the availability of information for travel planning;
- Benefit the public by providing improved access to public transportation within Glacier National Park and elsewhere in Montana;
- Maximize the efficiency of the transit shuttle system by taking advantage of transit planning, management and operations capabilities of existing area transit providers;
- Maximize the effectiveness of limited funding by combining funding from several sources, and;
- Maximize resource protection and environmental sustainability by using alternative fuels where practical in the operation of the shuttle vehicles.

“One additional key advantage for such a cooperative agreement is that it provides the flexibility to change as construction and visitor needs evolve. This will be especially important in the first few seasons as the shuttle system gets up and running,” stated Holm.

“We work hard to make the most of every tax dollar,” added Jim Lynch, MDT director. “Ongoing partnerships like this leverage funding and enable each agency to better serve the public.”

Montana Department of Transportation and Glacier National Park first joined forces when the two agencies announced in September 2005 a cooperative agreement to include park road information on the Montana 511 Traveler Information network. Montana’s 511 network provides accurate and up-to-date travel information concerning Sun Road status, delays in Glacier as well as other road conditions in the region. Mick Holm states, “The availability of park information through the Montana 511 system is helping ensure safe and successful road work, both inside and outside the park, and in various modes of information such as highway advisory radios, dynamic message signs and traveler web sites with the common goal of helping reassure travelers that they can continue enjoying the park, the Sun Road and the surrounding region.”

Glacier is one of only a handful of national parks throughout the country to have road information available on a state’s toll-free 511 system. Users can dial 511 from ANY Montana phone and select from an options menu. If a phone company does not support the 511 feature, or if callers are outside Montana, users can dial 1-800-226-7623.

For more information on MDT, please visit the Department’s official Web site at <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/> or call 406-444-6200. For more information on Eagle Transit, please visit the Flathead County Web site at <http://www.co.flathead.mt.us/Eagle/index.htm> or call 406-758-5728. For more information on Glacier, please visit the park’s official Web site at <http://www.nps.gov/glac> or call 406-888-7800.

**Editor’s Note:** Digital images of the Going-to-the-Sun Road *Sprinters* and artist renderings of the Optima buses are available upon request.